

Dear Christian Friends,

In 1799 the armies of Napoleon appeared on the heights above the town of Feldkirch, Austria. It was Easter It was Holy Saturday. The rays of the sun glittered on the weapons of the French, as they appeared drawn up on the hills to the west of the town. Help from the Austrian army was too far away to reach Feldkirch in time. The town would be taken and ransacked with little resistance. Their *HEARTS WERE HOPELESS*.

All through the night, the Town Council consulted together determining what was to be done, as villagers prayed and prayed for what was to come. After much discussion, the dean of the Church rose and said, “My brothers it is Easter Day! We have been reckoning our own strength, and that fails. Let us turn to God. Ring the bells and have service as usual, and leave the matter in God’s hands.”

They agreed to do as he said. And at sunrise, from the church towers in Feldkirch, there rang out to the hills a joyous tintinnabulation in honor of the Resurrection of our Lord. The streets filled with worshipers hastening to their churches.

The French heard the sudden ringing of the church bells with surprise and alarm. Napoleon’s officers, not realizing it was Easter Sunday, suspected that the Austrian army had moved into Feldkirch during the night. They ordered a hasty retreat, and by the time the bells stopped ringing, not a soldier was to be seen.¹ *HOPELESS HEARTS FIND HOPE*.

In our text for today, two disciples journey from Jerusalem to the town of Emmaus. A stranger, whom we know is Jesus, joins them. He asks them what they are talking about and they stop dead in their

tracks. They can hardly bring themselves to discuss it they are so saddened by the events of the last three days. Their friend, their master, their rabbi, the one they describe as a *mighty prophet*, has been unjustly condemned to death and violently killed on a cross.

Everything they had thought about him, everything they had wanted from him, all that they had hoped for, was now in the grave with him. And what’s more, there are reports about his tomb being empty going around and crazy notions of some who say he is alive. All this just adds confusion to their *HOPELESS HEARTS*.

But then Jesus begins to interpret the Old Testament and explains to them how all these things were spoken of by Moses and the Prophets. Starting at Genesis and going book by book, he no doubt explained the symbols, the word pictures, the sacrifices, the tabernacle and temple, such as he does in the book of Hebrews. He pointed out all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah and shows how he fulfilled each and every one of them.

Jesus shows them this by opening the Scriptures to them. Through the Bible he transforms their thinking. They had no idea these things were supposed to take place. They had concluded that Jesus’ mission had failed. But now they understood that the last three days was the plan all along. And better than that, they understood that Jesus, the Messiah, is risen! *HOPELESS HEARTS FIND HOPE*.

Remember Easter and the joy of that day? Even in our own homes, were not *our hearts burning within us* as we celebrated the day of our Lord’s resurrection? Like the disciples on the road, after they encountered the living Lord, are not these *burning* hearts what we desire - hearts that yearn, hearts that burn, hearts filled with hope?

Sadly, we have many different types of hearts don’t we? We have “*sad*

hearts”—hearts weighed down with the weight of sorrow, suffering, and sin. We have “*troubled hearts*”—hearts perplexed by the problems of life. We have “*weak hearts*”—hearts that struggle with the trials and temptations of life. We have “*doubtful hearts*”—hearts that are uncertain whether Christ really “*walks with us*” and works for our good. We have “*lukewarm hearts*”—hearts that are indifferent to things eternal and the relevancy of God’s Word. We have “*cold hearts*”—hearts that are not burning with the joy of the resurrection. And as we look at our lives—our thoughts, our actions, our words—realizing that we don’t do what God requires but that we end up doing what God forbids, then we must admit that we have “*HOPELESS HEARTS*”...no more hope than those townsfolk of Feldkirch before the dawn, no more hope than those disciples on the road, trying to deal with altered expectations, questions about the future, and a self-serving, self-preserving, hopeless hearts.

Yes, we often find ourselves walking on the road of life downcast, depressed, scared. Our *HEARTS ARE HOPELESS*. All around us, *in us*, we see sin. We see the coldness in our world. We see people go through the struggles of life, die, and then we never see them again. It seems that there is no purpose to life, that there’ll never be peace, that it’s all for nothing. It’s *HOPELESS*.

But whatever the temperature of your heart, the risen Christ meets you on the road of life. He speaks to you and “*breaks bread*” with you and reveals himself to you again and again as your risen Lord. Like the disciples, like the citizens of Feldkirch, it is Easter joy that makes all the difference. Jesus rekindles your heart. He fans the flame. He feeds the fire of your heart through his Word. And in doing so, your *HOPELESS HEART FINDS HOPE*.

In the Bible the word *HOPE* is not defined as a wistful desire, as something that may or may not come to pass. Biblical hope is absolutely true. It’s a guaranteed promise that has yet to be fulfilled. The Apostle Paul explains in his letter to the Ephesians: *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the HOPE to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe (Ep 1:18,19a)*. Thus, this sure, certain *HOPE* has become for us the reality of our future, in this life, and most importantly, in the life to come.

You see, Christ’s death and resurrection prove it. Jesus was raised from the dead to prove to the world that he had conquered sin, that he had conquered the devil, that he had conquered death. Jesus rose from the dead to prove that there is *HOPE*.

And now, as Jesus yet again opens your mind and your eyes, yet again your hearts are warmed. Life no longer bogs us down with a sense of guilt and fear of death. We live with a sense of immortality: *Because [he lives], you also shall live (Jn 14:19)*. Life is not hopeless. As we heard again last Sunday, we have been born anew *into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1Pt 1:3)*. We do not walk hopeless to the grave. The risen Christ promises, *this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life. And I will raise him up on the Last Day. (Jn 6:40)*.

These are the words – this is the Word – that comes to you along the road of life, each and every day. It is just when we go back to the old grind we remember, “Christ is risen!” It is just when we face a seemingly insurmountable problem that we believe “Christ is risen!” It is just when we stand at the grave of a loved one that we

hope in promised certainty “Christ is risen!” It is just when we find our steps heavy, our spirits sagging, and our hearts growing cold that the risen Jesus meets us on the road and tells us, “I am risen!”

Yes, once again he walks with us. He speaks to us in his Word. He opens to us the Scriptures. He opens our eyes to see. And our hearts are warmed. *Sad hearts* are filled with joy. *Troubled hearts* are filled with peace. *Weak hearts* are filled with

strength. *Doubtful and despairing hearts* are filled peace. *Lukewarm hearts* are filled with conviction. *Hopeless hearts* are filled with hope. For there is no sin he does not forgive, there is no hurt he does not heal, and there is no emptiness he does not fill. Truly warms our hearts of hopelessness to hearts burning with abounding hope! With those Emmaus disciples we pray, *Stay with us*, Lord. AMEN.

ⁱ <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/the-sound-of-church-bells>